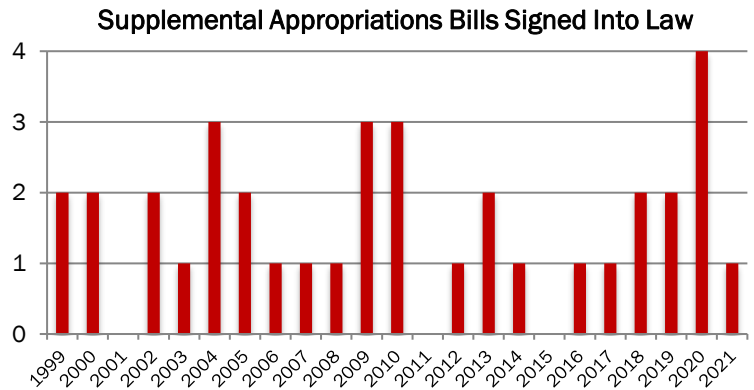




SUPPLEMENTAL EMERGENCY APPROPRIATIONS ABUSE

“Never allow a good crisis to go to waste.”¹ When President Obama’s former chief of staff Rahm Emanuel said this, it became the rallying cry for Congress to abuse the budget process. Repeatedly Congress tucks in billions of unrelated spending projects in every supplemental appropriations bill, which have averaged more than one per year over the past decade.² For instance, in the supplemental for Hurricane Sandy relief, Congress boosted salaries for the FBI, among other agencies not handling disaster mitigation.³ These supplementals contribute to runaway deficit spending, which leads to either steep tax increases, less spending power due to inflation – disproportionately hurting the poor and retired – or leaves our children and grandchildren to foot the bill.⁴



- **Supplementals have evaded budget limits.**

- Due to concern over the rising debt, Congress passed the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, establishing deficit limits over a six year period.⁵ More recently, the Budget Control Act of 2011 established limits on discretionary spending for fiscal years 2012 to 2021.⁶
- Although normal supplementals are subject to these budget limits, Congress created a loophole for itself by allowing supplemental spending to be designated as “emergency” spending, exempt from budget limits.⁷
- Consequently, almost 92% of supplemental spending from 1991 to 1999 was designated as emergency spending and eluded budget limits.⁸ The total cost of supplementals in 2020 alone ballooned to over \$3 trillion.⁹

- **Congress abuses “emergency” designations to spend beyond what’s permitted.**

- When Congress designates the supplementals as “emergency” spending, the bills circumvent budget limits even if the funds in question are not targeted to the emergency.
- The CARES Act, which evaded budget limits on relief for the COVID-19 crisis, included \$75 million for the National Endowment for the Arts and another \$75 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities.¹⁰ These are just two of many examples of funding intended to be included in regular appropriations bills.
- Supplementals occasionally include budget cuts in other areas but rarely offset the cost of the entire bill.¹¹ Therefore, America is borrowing and paying interest on this money.
- While disasters and other emergencies are difficult to predict, Congress should act responsibly by limiting emergency spending to the crisis at hand and not use the crisis as an excuse to spend further on unrelated political priorities.
- Congress should also budget for actual emergency spending in advance by setting aside “rainy day”

funds in the twelve regular appropriations bills passed each year, just like the average American is required to do with their own budget.

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¹ Rahm Emanuel. Let's make sure this crisis doesn't go to waste. The Washington Post. March 20, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/25/lets-make-sure-this-crisis-doesnt-go-waste/>

² Appropriations Status Table. Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/AppropriationsStatusTable>

³ Pub. L. No. 116-136

⁴ Supplemental Appropriations in the 1990s. The Congressional Budget Office. March 2001. <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2018-07/1990s.pdf>

⁵ Megan Lynch. Statutory Budget Controls in Effect Between 1985 and 2002. Congressional Research Service. July 1, 2011. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41901.pdf>

⁶ James Saturno. Emergency Spending: Statutory and Congressional Rules. The Congressional Research Service. July 24, 2007. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20070724_RS21035_9c6b2f810602bf1124c373ac62c6b1af2bea814c.pdf

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Supplemental Appropriations in the 1990s. The Congressional Budget Office. March 2001. <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2018-07/1990s.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2021/01/heres-everything-congress-has-done-to-respond-to-the-coronavirus-so-far>

¹⁰ Pub. L. No. 113-2

¹¹ William Painter. Offsets, Supplemental Appropriations, and the Disaster Relief Fund: FY1990-FY2013. The Congressional Research Service. December 4, 2012. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42458.pdf>